08

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editor's note

Once again we are confronted with the blank page
the host of the terror of Language and Poetry
the pain, despair and anger they try to alleviate,
to break, but only extend them and by extension
reflect the unsavoury days we spend convincing
ourselves that open office plans give us freedom
that having more choices empower us, that
sharing opinion after opinion will produce truth

Illusions, for sure, but the alternatives offer
little to no solace

Driven by the desire to create and destroy,
to speak for oneself and to speak for others,
to strive for change and to let the futility of the
effort change us, to navigate through these
troubling times alone and to walk hand-in- hand
with those who wish to reach the same destination,
to sit and wait for inspiration or to seize it with
our own bare hands

Such are the contradictions we must face
and struggle to overcome

The temptation to let ourselves
get comfortable in hell and be friends with demons
to know every bit of its pit well enough to one day
burn it to ashes with its own fire is always there
and will always be there, but the question still remains:
What then? What next?
Have we not learned about the dangers of fighting
fire with fire?

To the promise of the blank page we shall return
to the place of our silent battle

IT HURTS TO BE MURDERED

For Diane di Prima

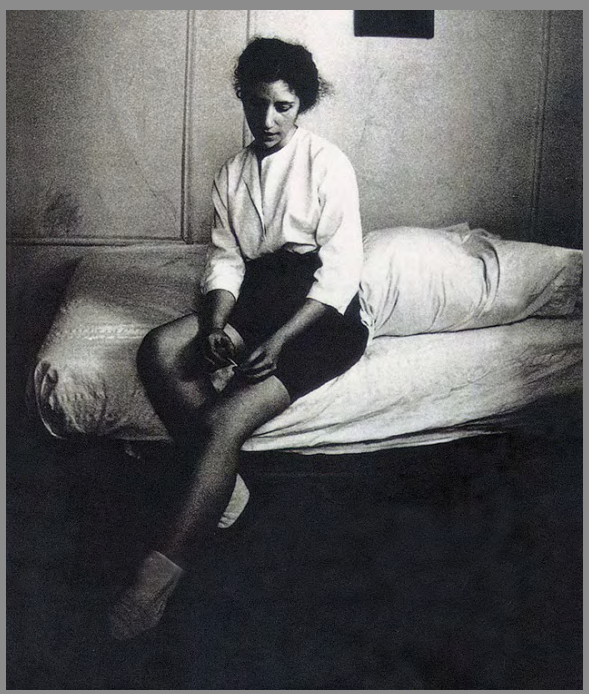
Walls are partially imaginary
I sit on one table and I see
there are several shadows
Everywhere I see eyes
Black eyes, no green eyes
Maybe scarlet
Who knows?

Are you listening, Diane?
I have abolished my sex
Yes, I have
I have no desires
Such reminds me of Morissey
I become him
There are only incidents after incidents
Burning flies, buzzing streets
The workers in ties, the noose:
be a little discreet
Shadows are partially walls

Are you listening to me, Diane?
I feel there is someone here
He wants my shadow
eats it
fucks it
steals my shadow
Murder it
All my silence, my shrieking
Pretend I am already dead

I am drunk with life right now
I am in terrible pain
But there are many types of pain
Aren't there?
Tell me so, and I won't believe you
I do not believe in credulous rumors
not even by hundreds of retweets
But you wouldn't understand that
Would you, Diane?

I see many eyes, still
Many types of animals also
Many mice and many stars
But I only see one type of shadow:
scarlet shadow
Dead and forgotten
Who knows, Diane
Who knows?



Diane di Prima

STRAWMAN ON THE 13TH DAY

The Strawman took a big gulp of cold tea,
Then leaned on the nearest *ficus religiosa*

He became confounded. The entirety
Of his short time, was it to serve?

When Clarity embraces him, big, wet, and sludgy:
Those dozen days of sit-down-and-be-quiet, was it a *pharmakon*?

The lesson's over, and yet he
still does not master the field

FOR THE TIME BEING—what about it?
Protect it from the grasshoppers? Grow poppies and bleed them dry?

Equalize the napiers? Sow goldish *oryza sativa*?
He did what any sensible minds would do.

He conjured יהוה and شيطان,
Death and Dream,

Angels with ugly
Faces, and Devils with slick hair.

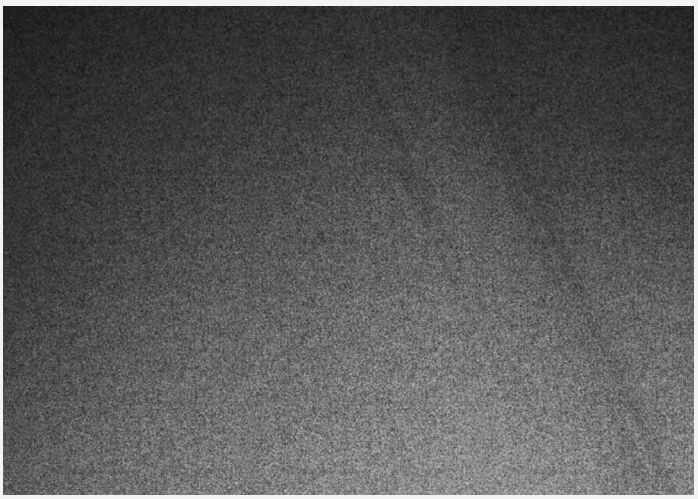
So he could justify his next act;
To drown the field and let it rot.

In his wait new creatures breathed,
The kind that knew what to do and how to be

As he looked around he saw the new
World was dying, while the old one struggled to be reborn,

And now,
And now,

It is the time for The Monsters.



THE POETICS OF (NON) SPACE

Yesterday
I wrote the word
absence
a hundred times

absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence
absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence
absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence
absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence
absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence
absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence
absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence
absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence
absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence
absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence absence

as if possessed by a demon
who shows himself in
the trembling shadows of proud men

as if writing it down would miraculously
materialize its meaning

as if demons believed in miracles.

She went on and on
about the beauty of negative space
and how the promise of emptiness
moved her:
the perfect image
consists of things where something
is not.

She
wanted to remove herself
completely
from the face of the earth
from the grace of death
even if that meant
she wouldn't get to
to admire the empty spot
where
she
could've been.

The irony of the sky:
visible emptiness
filled by an invisible god
whose existence you deny
yet still curse at for
taking up too much space.

To support the over-
production of words is
to support The Myth of
Prolificacy—
created and spread
to shame silence
and to shame silence
is to spit on the gaps that
make
language possible
but still
they speak, but *still*
they write
without pause, without
thought
and claim to be the saviours
of
Language!

Oh, silence, oh
void where language blooms,
we've become
parrots parroting other parrots
parroting themselves. Parrots
in a cage.

MIMPI NO. 32

Dunia sudah hampir kiamat. Saat fajar, dengan langit yang berwarna abu-abu dan tidak begitu terang, aku menemukan diriku di dalam kerumunan orang banyak. Sejauh mata memandang, bukit-bukit tinggi berjejeran dan tersusun rapi, seperti bentangan gedung-gedung kota metropolitan. Semua orang memandang ke langit. Aku bertanya kepada orang-orang di sekitar apakah dunia benar-benar ¬sudah kiamat sekarang. Semua mengangguk setuju tanpa sepatah katapun keluar dari mulut mereka, lengkap dengan tatapan kosong dan ekspresi datar. Aku anggap mereka sudah ahli dalam hal ini, atau, mereka sudah memprediksi ini sebelumnya.

Lalu, sebuah pengumuman terdengar dari *loudspeaker* sebesar jendela. “Sebentar lagi kita akan menyaksikan sebuah tabrakan hebat antara bumi dengan sebuah meteor besar. Waktu saat ini adalah pukul 10 pagi. Estimasi waktu tabrakan adalah sekitar 20 menit .” Pengumuman tersebut terus diulang seolah diputar dari rekaman kaset yang di set dalam mode *loop*. Orang-orang sama sekali tidak menunjukkan tanda-tanda gelisah. Mereka tampak tentram dan nyaman. Sebuah pemandangan yang familiar, dimana aku melihat banyak dari kerabat-kerabat terdekatku menunjukkan gelagat serupa. Hampir tidak ada raut kekhawatiran sedikitpun di kerut wajah mereka. Entah tidak peduli akan keadaan dunia yang sedang kacau balau atau berusaha untuk puas dengan apa yang mereka capai selama hidup di dunia.

Belum selesai mencapai konklusi dari kekhawatiranku, jarak meteornya kini sudah terlalu dekat.

Aku terbangun dengan perasaan bahwa, jika dunia benar-benar akan kiamat, keadaan tersebut sangat mungkin terjadi.

Live by the Sword, Die by the Sword, Ellen Rodgers

YANG TERSESATKAN

Apa yang harus dilakukan bagi seseorang untuk menjadi 'tercerahkan' di zaman paska-fordisme ini? Ketika harus tenggelam dalam bisingnya arus produk dan informasi yang secara buas memburu perhatian?

Mungkin sulit dengan situasi/keadaan sehari-hari yang mau-tak-mau membuat kita harus ikut terciprat dengan riuh bising sekitaran. Jatuhnya kita hanya bisa mendamaikan saja tanpa membuat terputus media sosial yang terunggah ke dalam diri kita dan diri kita yang terunggah padanya. Dan dalam proses berdamai tersebut, mudah sekali kita memilih untuk menjadi eskapis—lari dari riuh ke-duniawi-an ini untuk mencari ketenangan dari sang Alam dan jawaban dari Langit.

Di negeri ini, tak asing untuk mengidentikan 'pencerahan' dengan hal-hal yang berbau spiritual, dan lebih lagi, supernatural. Bukan sebuah keanehan untuk mendengar dalam perseteruan antara satu politisi dan lainnya, mereka melakukan konsultasi dengan para ahli supernatural untuk meraih kepentingan mereka dan menyikut sesamanya dengan 'ilmu hitam'; atau mudahnya membayangkan seorang Presiden menyempatkan waktunya untuk bersemedi di sebuah Gua entah dimana untuk mencari nasihat spiritual dari atas sana.
Seolah-olah seperti cahaya yang datang dari Langit—bahwa sesuatu yang di luar jangkauan kita, di luar keterbatasan tiga dimensi dunia kita ini, terpapar jawaban-jawaban dan pemahaman yang lebih hakiki di atas sana dan yang perlu kita lakukan adalah mengaksesnya (misalnya, semedi sebagai kunci untuk mengakses langit tersebut).

Namun spiritualitas atau ke-supernatural-an ini bisa menjadi tak semenarik dan tak serelevan itu ketika kita *mentok* dengan kenyataan materiilnya—ujung-ujungnya, apapun yang turun dari langit tentunya tak terlepas dari keadaan/konstruksi sosial dan bahkan juga relasi produksi yang ada. Misalnya saja, seorang nabi yang mendapatkan wahyu di zaman batu mungkin tidak akan terpikirkan untuk membuat sebuah korporasi multinasional dan mengkhotbahkan kalau itu akan menyelamatkan umatnya dari keterpurukan zaman.

Belum lagi dengan segelintir orang tertentu yang memiliki akses ke langit tersebut—entah orang 'pintar' atau pemimpin dalam satu bentuk atau lainnya—otomatis butuh dibangun Institusi untuk melangsungkan dan memastikan agar 'titipan dari langit' tersebut bisa terus berjalan dan teraplikasikan dalam kehidupan masyarakat.

Seperti yang dibahas oleh Reuven dan Gabrielle Benner dalam bukunya yang berjudul *A World of Chance*, manusia selalu membuat institusi dan tradisi untuk menjawab pertanyaan-pertanyaan tentang bagaimana menghadapi kondisi yang penuh akan ketidakpastian dan resiko dan juga dalam melegitimasi tindakan yang dilakukan untuk kondisi-kondisi tersebut. Mungkin jika dulu kita punya shaman, peramal, dan bentuk-bentuk pengetahuan yang tidak ilmiah seperti Astrologi—sekarang kita memiliki ahli ekonomi dan orang-orang Wall Street beserta pengetahuan 'ilmiah'nya untuk menentukan nasib dari sebagian besar bagian masyarakat *(entah siapa yang lebih kena dampak buruknya, para ahli atau sisanya yang bukan ahli)*.

Meski yang dibahas adalah persoalan resiko, probabilitas, dan kesempatan, kita bisa melihat kesamaan dengan persoalan pencerahan dari langit ini. Dalam bukunya, terpapar sebuah pengamatan dari Keith Thomas soal perdebatan dalam menolak kebetulan/kecelakaan/peluang di antara teolog-teolog protestan pada abad ke-16 dan 17—bahwa keberuntungan, kesialan, dan bahkan penyakit semuanya berasal dari kehendak tuhan dan satu-satunya saluran yang bisa menyuarakan kehendak-Nya hanya institusi dan otoritas agama. Butuh beberapa lama waktu sampai akhirnya jumlah populasi yang ada memadai bagi para ahli statistik untuk menemukan pola yang nantinya terpakai oleh perusahaan-perusahaan asuransi dalam menentukan preminya.

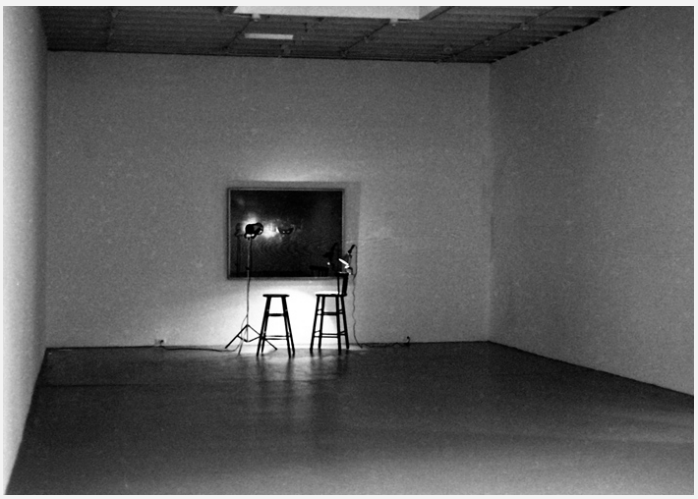
Seperti tak terhindarkan—apapun itu yang turun dari langit, seberapapun sucinya ia, akan kepentok juga dengan 'kotornya' kenyataan materiilnya. Bahkan ketika konsep pencerahan lain lagi yang fokusnya bukan dari langit, tapi dengan 'kembali pada bumi dan alam'…untuk menyatukan vibrasi yang ada dengan semesta. Sekarang rasanya lebih sulit bagi saya untuk ingin bersatu dengan alam atau kembali kepada Ibu Pertiwi, ketika sang Bumi-Pertiwi juga sedang dalam proses mengunggah dirinya ke langit yang berbeda—langit yang terbuat dari perangkat lunak, pengawasan agensi intelijen, dan algoritme rekomendasi produk pasar elektronik. Entah kapan akan terjadi bentrok antara advokat New Age dengan pionir startupism yang ingin meng-angka-kan semua yang ada di planet ini—bukannya bentrok, malah perpaduannya yang sudah terlihat: kuil-kuil Transhumanist atau juga gerakan Mormon Transhumanist yang ingin menghilangkan keterbatasan biologis untuk mendekatkan umat dengan keagungan-Nya.

Jika Langit, Bumi atau Alam terpentok juga, apakah lari di tempat dan berdiam dalam hutan beton perkotaan satu-satunya pilihan yang ada? Seperti ungkapan yang pernah dilontarkan oleh kenalan-dari-seorang kenalan kepada saya: "Ngapain nyari-nyari 'pencerahan' di tempat seperti Tibet atau Bhutan! Justru kalau bisa 'tercerahkan' di kota Metropolitan yang tiap detik ada orang yang bunuh diri karena memeras otak dan ototnya—baru itu namanya 'tercerahkan'!"
Mendengar itu, saya tergoda untuk mengangguk menyetujui ungkapannya dalam hati saya. Namun Ia juga membesitkan dalam pikiran: imaji hutan-hutan beton, keberlangsungan hidup, dan persaingan dalam rimba modern—bahwa menjadi tercerahkan adalah menjadi bibit unggulan yang penuh akan aksen 'Darwinian'.

Untuk apa lagi-lagi menjadikan perlombaan yang tak kunjung selesai ini sebagai tujuan? Melawan pengaruh negara dunia pertama dengan mencoba menjadi negara dunia pertama? Melawan Penjajah dengan menjadi Penjajah? Seperti mengamini perkataan seorang kakek tua yang pernah bilang kalau kita hanya menghancurkan dengan tangan kiri apa yang kita bangun dengan tangan kanan.

Jika saat ini berdiam diri lah yang bisa mendekatkan kejernihan dan ketajaman pikiran yang mampu menembus bising ini tanpa perlu merasa harus menyalahkan kebisingan tersebut…maka mungkin kepada kekosongan dan diam itu lah sebaiknya kita beralih—bukan berlari menuju dan berdoa pada yang di atas maupun bawah. Semoga dalam diam tersebut, Ia bukan menjadi justifikasi untuk tidak bertindak, tetapi untuk menjadi alat dalam mengasah ketajaman itu dan memisahkan butir emas dari butiran-butiran pasir lainnya.

Poet and the Audience, Raul Guerrero, 1982



SOME SERIOUS STATEMENTS ON POETRY AND THEIR CONTRADICTIONS, AND VIOLENCE

"The question is", said Alice, "whether you can make words mean different things".

"The question is", said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be Master—that's all."

I

It is crucial to understand that experimental poetry is usually—not exclusively—written by highly educated and/or well-read people. The work itself also tends to expect to be read by highly educated people: it employs poetic techniques recognized as familiar by only a small group of highly educated (or) well-read people. That does not immediately mean the alienation of readers unfamiliar with such techniques, but it is still an obvious risk. Gaining political change through poetry also entails *mobilizing large numbers of people from a range of educational backgrounds.*

II

This engagement with difficult material—let us say, in today's context, with difficult 'experimental' poetry—challenges the automatic responses and ingrained 'common-sense' conceptualized within our reality, pulling the world into new and totally different shapes. This can indeed be emotional for some, as exhibited long ago by modern Indonesian poetry in the past fifty years or so, be it reactionary or not—the post-Angkatan '45 generation from Remy Sylado (*mbeling* poetry) to prose-poem writer like Afrizal Malna. It is admittedly a creative act: (new) meaning is made, through labour, and not just received. This should also apply to us. Creative thinking is essential for any militant protest or strategy in confronting capitalism with its hypocrisies. As a labour, such creative and critical engagement is indeed tiring and time-consuming. Poetry is for the retired, for those who have the time; the dilettantes who have money; the academics who are paid to read; for the poets who claw back the day.

III

It is safe to say that the majority of Indonesian poetry written at the moment is non-collaborative. It is written alone, and tends towards the expression and celebration of the individual through the very fact that it is *my* poem, written by *me*, usually read by *me*, standing up straight and tall in front of a collection of people called an 'audience', who sit opposite *me*. The group is silent while the author speaks. Even those very facts underline how different poetry—as it is conventionally practiced among us—is to participatory politics, or to the political moment of collective action. The author/authority poet reads to the silent audience; the professor lectures the students; the ulama delivers a *khotbah* in the mosque; the orator addresses the rally; the politician with the microphone on the TV addresses the nation. The structure is as old as kingship, as old as God. It is that of the visual and oral dominance of *the one over the many*—even if and while in all these situations—the audiences have chosen to listen and even enjoy it.

IV

A poetry reading, even by the most flamboyantly gesticular, is not essentially mobile. It remains dormant at the edge of the seat. But a lot of political actions are. This does not condemn poetry readings, of course, or other non-mobile activities. But it undeniably has consequences like, for example, readings at the site of protest, or in the midst of protest, which risk replicating the structure I have presented above: the one in front of the many. Theatrical works or, say, dance collaborations are less so (I am thinking of Brecht), for there is more than one human figure to draw attention; there is a greater communication of collective creativity.

V

This description by David Graeber (the British anthropologist/anarchist) of direct action and protest is one of my favourites: *"[...] extreme individuals [...] engaged in a purely co-operative enterprise that also involves transgressing ordinary boundaries."* It is not entirely impossible here in Indonesia to imagine a self-organizing group of poets who could be described in such a way, but the way we usually make and read our poetry would have to alter radically. This desire of mine betrays a desire for poetry to be part of political 'event-making' (in Badiouian sense), in some capacity.

"The triumph of revolution is the triumph of poetry"
Julio Cortazar, Buenos Aires, Argentina

VI

The traditional elements of difficult poetry may have unexpected advantages in a moment of, say, political protest, or any other event that requires a spontaneous reaction. I recalled watching a man reading a poem by Widji Thukul in front of a line of riot police in Bandung a long time ago, back when I was still in college. The absurdity of the act highlights the absurdity of the violence turned towards him. Would a woman reading a poem in the same conditions, produce the same effect?

VII

For some reason, there is always this assumption that poets are powerless. The problem is not merely because of the advantage and/or leverage we have in any marketplace, even the most 'successful' among us; but because 'words' coming out of anyone's mouth are so often held to be impotent. Yet, I think, this is scarcely the case; and the reasons have much to do with the intricate inter-relations of the state, language, and violence.

VIII

Judges articulate their understanding of a text, and as a result somebody loses their freedom, their property, their children, even their life. The 'interpretations' or 'conversations' that are the preconditions for violent incarceration are themselves acts of violence, which I see as being enacted in a language which is performative, but in a manner which is deferred. This deferral matters immensely. For it is shared *consensus* that makes those present in a wedding concur that the protagonists are now 'wife' and 'husband'.

Although, it must be kept in mind that the violence of judges differs from the violence that exists in poetry and/or literature. No matter how a poet urges his/her readers to cut his/her throats should they meet on the street, the readers will not easily comply. This is mainly because, the readers, perhaps unfortunately (or fortunately—it depends), have neither seen verbal (poetic) injunction as an *authorization for an action*, nor as an *order*. That being said, it is right to say that the language of violence only works under certain (socio-political) preconditions and assumptions; a language-game becomes social, requiring people to be sociable.

IX

Let's talk about the language of protest. In almost every protest I have participated in, spontaneous or not, there was always a sense that anything could happen. We could be detained in the first twenty minutes of protest; we could be lying on the ground with batons and blood gushing out of our heads; or we could go home proudly, singing and marching on with our fists held up high. It was really mysterious, dangerous, but at the same time, exciting. We felt we had agency, even while we knew it was temporary. We could see the results of our defiance on the happy faces around us. It was disorderly, perhaps even a little silly, potentially damaging. Everything, every feeling, was jumbled up in one instance. Every institution and the police who protect them want to impose order and straight lines and hierarchy, and yet we strive to resist—we strive to defend. I would like some of the affective energies of protests such as these to be opened up in poetry readings sometimes, or (ideally) in everyday life. To be in touch with poets, with fellow comrades; to be drenched in blood and sweat. Where has this ever happened? Are we, perhaps, too afraid to die?

X

Talk about dying, in around 1920 the Peruvian poet César Vallejo wrote:

Samain would say the air is calm and of a
contained sadness.

Vallejo says today Death is welding
every frontier to every strand of lost hair, from
the dish of a frontal bone, where there's
seaweed, lemon balm singing sacred mastic
trees on guard, and antiseptic poems without
an owner.

Samain's poem, which Vallejo is quoting from here, is set in front of a hospice—a place where people go to die. His own poem, which is written against Samain's, presents disjoined things: the disjunctive and violent poetics of avant-gardism. But the poem here says that 'Death is welding' these things together. This, I think, can be read in two ways. First, the word 'welding' takes us to the factory, so this can be interpreted as something like the dead labour which forms the time of capitalist production. Second, and more precisely here, Death is welding 'every frontier', i.e. every limit, i.e. where things become other than what they are and pass through the negative. Here, the meaning would be: everything passes through the negative, which for the Subject is *death*.

XI

I write angrily, melancholically, often out of desire for change and frustration or despair at the current political configuration. I refer to political events in my poems, sometimes to complex political machinations and give them to people who (more or less) already know these things. Why do I never write of the moments in protest which are luminous with excitement? Or try to capture how the people in Bukit Duri (or any other place and home: demolished) feel when the place they lived in is transformed by collective efforts and direct action? To explain to passers-by what is going on and how hearing their interest and support gives me renewed hope, or at least momentarily shifts and realigns my conception of the (so-called) 'public'? Are we not able to write *interestingly* about happiness?